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Book Review by Mikhail Tsympkin of The  
Russian Military: Power and Policy, edited by  
Steven E. Miller and Dmitri V. Trenin

Tsympkin, Mikhail

MIT Press

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M.Tsympkin, "The Russian Military: Power and Policy, Cambridge" (2004), pp. 1  
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# Steven E. Miller and Dmitri V. Trenin, eds., *The Russian Military: Power and Policy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

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## Mikhail Tsypkin

The Russian military largely went below the radar of Western interest after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. More than a decade after the creation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, they have become again the object of interest for scholars – this time, both Western and Russian, as demonstrated by the reviewed volume, whose editors assembled a group of extraordinarily knowledgeable experts from Russia and the West. In his introduction, Steven Miller explains that the purpose this study has been to “assess the military that Russia now possesses.” He notes that despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s defense policy “has enormous implications for ... global security,” because it is a major power in Eurasia and global military power. Moreover, it is the only of the post-Soviet states that has “residual superpower mindset.”

The assessment provides a wealth of detail on the state of the Russian military. As defense spending catastrophically collapsed in the 1990s, and troops were withdrawn from the bases in the former Warsaw pact nations and Soviet republics into what often turned out to be a logistical void in Russia, the morale of the officer corps plummeted, combat training became an exception to the rule, draft dodging became pervasive, and younger officers began an exodus from the military. At the same time, as Aleksandr Golts show in his chapter on the social and political condition of the Russian military, the top generals enjoy considerable political clout, which sometimes goes as far as undermining presidential orders. Golts explains this unusual (for the Soviet and Russian tradition) pattern of civil-military relations by the dependency of Putin’s regime on the war in Chechnya. Putin, as Golts observes, also kept his promise to begin paying the officers’ salaries on time, something Boris Yeltsin never did. Nevertheless, the socio-economic condition of the Russian military remains perilous.

The title of the chapter by Pavel Baev is quite suggestive: “The trajectory of the Russian military: downsizing, degeneration and defeat.” Baev tracks attempts to refashion the Russian military beginning with the “early chaos and missed opportunities” of 1992-1993, through the first war in Chechnya (1994-96), the “half-hearted reforms” under Minister of Defense Marshal Igor Sergeev, and the “march away from reform” under President Vladimir Putin. Dr. Alexei Arbatov, who served for a number of years as deputy chairman of the Defense Committee of the Russian State Duma, named his chapter “Military Reform: From Crisis to Stagnation.” In it, he richly documents various aspects of military reform, especially the funding for reform and plans for introduction of “professional,” or volunteer enlisted service. Dr. Arbatov also offers a program for change: reduction in the size of the military down to 800,000; a shift to an all-volunteer service; and doubling the wages of volunteer enlisted men and commissioned officers.

Roy Allison surveys Russia’s use of military power in regional conflicts from the wars in Chechnya, to operations within the CIS to the experience in the Balkans and to the lessons learned from the US campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Allison concludes that the Russian military has failed to truly adapt to the requirements of “low-intensity” regional conflicts: in Chechnya, for instance, the stubborn adherence to the operational art devised for the war against NATO has left the Russian forces unable to deal successfully with the critical requirements of “peace operations” after cessation of major hostilities.

Dr. Vitaly Shlykov considers the material foundation of the Russian military – the defense industry. The Russian Federation inherited the bulk of the Soviet defense industrial complex, which has barely adjusted to reduction in the size of orders and an end of government subsidies. While the industry continues to export weapons, it will be unable to rearm Russia without substantial investment, which is nowhere on the horizon.

Russian nuclear arsenal, in Rose Gottemoeller’s analysis, has played an important political role since the end of the Soviet Union, providing fundamental security for the Russian state. Carrying out this mission on the basis of a very tight budget, resulted in an acrimonious conflict between the Minister of Defense Marshal Igor Sergeev and the Chief of General Staff Army General Anatoly Kvashnin. Serveev, the former commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, attempted to insulate, as much as possible, the strategic nuclear forces from the budget crunch in the aftermath of the financial meltdown of 1998. Kvashnin won, and funding for nuclear weapons took second seat to that of conventional forces, and plans were announced to cut the number of ICBMs. This policy did not survive long – already in 2003 Russia had to buy from Ukraine strategic bombers and ICBMs warehoused there. The result, as Gottemoeller states, has been that the strategic nuclear forces of Russia “will retain the same composition as they had had during the Cold War years.”

In his concluding chapter, Dmitri Trenin observes that the Russian military has kept, like many other European militaries, its Cold War structure. Russia’s case is special, however, because military reform is both part of the massive socio-economic transformation of the nation as a whole, and because the military is so central to the Russian national identity. The difficulty of this transformation explains why the Kremlin in the early 1990s, had to “buy” the loyalty of the high command by delaying radical military reform. Trenin notes that given the stress experienced by the armed forces in the 1990s, it is remarkable that the military did neither rebel nor collapse.

This short review hardly does justice to the wealth of expertise and detail to be found in this slim volume. The contributors touch practically on all important issues concerning the Russian military today, and make informed and balanced suggestions about its future.

## References

Bibliographical reference

Steven E. Miller and Dmitri V. Trenin, eds., *The Russian Military: Power and Policy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

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